

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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FM AMEMBASSY LISBON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6383

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MADRID

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMCONSUL OPORTO

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMCONSUL PONTA DELGADA

USMISSION NATO

DIA WASHDC

USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GER

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 LISBON 1693

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PO

SUBJ: ELCTIONS: SHIFT TO THE RIGHT IN LEIRIA

REF: LISBON 1230 (DTG 251644Z FEB 76)

SUMMARY: STRONG SHIFT TO THE RIGHT IS UNDERWAY AMONG THE 270,000 VOTERS IN THE SMALL AND PREDOMINATELY AGRICULTURAL AND FISHING DISTRICT OF LEIRIA, BETWEEN LISBON AND OPORTO. THE OVERWHELMING CONCERN OF LEIRIANS REMAINS THE EFFECT OF THE GONCALVES GOVERNMENT AND OF THE COMMUNISTS ON THE SENSITIVITIES OF THESE BASICALLY CONSERVATIVE PEOPLE. THE CDS IS THE MOST DYNAMIC PARTY IN THE DISTRICT, BUT HAS ONLY BEEN ABLE TO ORGANIZE FREELY IN THE PAST SIX MONTHS. THE PPD IS THE BEST ORGANIZED PARTY IN THE DISTRICT, AND WILL PROBABLY BE ABLE TO INCREASE ITS MARGIN OF VICTORY. THE PS IS IN A DEFESIVE POSITION,
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SEEKING TO HOLD ON TO ITS WORKING CLASS VOTE WHILE MAKING IN-

ROADS INTO THE SMALL COMMUNIST AND MDP VOTE. END SUMMARY.

1. BACKGROUND ON LEIRIA: FOLLOWING REPORT IS BASED ON VISIT BY EMBOFF TO DISTRICT OF LEIRIA MARCH 11 AND 12. LEIRIA IS A LARGELY AGRICULTURAL AND FISHING DISTRICT EXTENDING FROM 40 TO 110 MILES NORTH OF LISBON. LEIRIA ALSO HAS POCKETS OF GLASS, PLASTIC, AND METALWORKING INDUSTRY, ONE OF WHICH - MARINHA GRANDE - HAS BEEN A TRADITIONAL AREA OF COMMUNIST STRENGTH. LEIRIA DIVIDED ITS 270,000 VOTES (OF 6.2 MILLION NATIONALLY) IN THE 1975 CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS AS FOLLOWS:

PPD - 35.5 PERCENT - 5 DEPUTIES
PS - 33.1 PERCENT - 5 DEPUTIES
CDS - 6.7 PERCENT - 1 DEPUTY
PCP - 6.4 PERCENT - 0 DEPUTIES
MDP - 3.4 PERCENT - 0 DEPUTIES.

2. KEY ISSUES AND INFLUENCES:

-- ANTI-COMMUNISM: THE PRINCIPAL ISSUE IN LEIRIA REMAINS THE TRAUMATIC, PSYCHOLOGICAL STRAIN OF THE GONCALVES AND PER-NOV 25 PERIOD. LEIRIANS REMEMBER VIVIDLY THE SILENT MARCH IN SUPPORT OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE COMMUNIST-PROVOKED TRASHING OF PCP AND FAR LEFT PARTY HEADQUARTERS IN LATE AUGUST 1975. LEIRIANS ALSO RECALL ASSEMBLING IN LARGE NUMBERS OUTSIDE MONTE REAL AIR BASE ON NOV 25 TO PRESSURE THE MUTINOUS LEFTIST PARATROOPS INTO SURRENDER. PAST COMMUNIST EFFORTS TO INTIMIDATE THE PEOPLE AND IMPOSE THEIR WILL DOMINATE ALL OTHER ISSUES IN THE DISTRICT.

-- ECONOMIC: LEIRIA HAS BEEN SPARED THE SEVERE ECONOMIC DISLOCATIONS OF OTHER AREAS. MOST LEIRIANS ARE SMALL FARMERS, AND MANY OF THOSE EMPLOYED IN FACTORIES MAINTAIN THEIR OWN SMALL PLOTS ON THE SIDE - THEREBY REDUCING THE IMPACT OF INFLATION. EVEN IN FACTORIES, WORKERS HAVE KEPT THEIR JOBS AND BETTERED THEIR WAGES DESPITE REDUCED MANAGEMENT PROFITS. UNTIL THE MOST RECENT GROUP OF 800 ANGOLAN REFUGEES ARRIVED FROM WINDHOEK TWO WEEKS AGO, LEIRIA HAD NO SIGNIFICANT REFUGEE PROBLEM.

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-- THE CHURCH: THE CHURCH MAINTAINS VERY SIGNIFICANT INFLUENCE IN LEIRIA. WHILE THE BISHOP OF LEIRIA EXPRESSED GREAT CONCERN ABOUT THE FALLOFF IN NUMBERS OF SEMINARIANS, HE NOTED THAT ALMOST ALL LEIRIAN SCHOOLCHILDREN (OR THEIR PARENTS) HAVE SIGNED UP TO CONTINUE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION, AND THAT MASS ATTENDANCE IS UP SOMEWHAT FROM BEFORE THE REVOLUTION.

3. EFFECT OF THESE INFLUENCES: LOCAL OBSERVERS EMBOFF TALKED TO AGREE THAT THE ABUSES OF THE GONCLAVES PERIOD WILL PRODUCE A MARKED SWING TO THE RIGHT AMONG THE BASICALLY CONSERVATIVE POPULATION OF LEIRIA. THE HIGH PERCENTAGE OF LEIRIANS ARE STILL WELL DISPOSED TO DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT, BUT ONLY ONE WHICH PROMISES STABILITY AND RESPECT FOR THE PEOPLE'S VALUES.

-- ANTI-LEFT: ANTI-COMMUNIST FEELINGS WERE GREATLY STRENGTHENED OVER THE PAST YEAR; AND THE PREVAILING SENTIMENT IS ALSO ANTI-LEFTIST AND ANTI-SOCIALIST. THE INDEPENDENT PRESIDENT OF THE TOWN COUNCIL OF PORTO MOS ADVISED THE PPD TO DROP THE WORD "SOCIALISM" FROM ITS ELECTION VOCABULARY IN FAVOR OF "SOCIAL-DEMOCRACY" WHICH MANY LEIRIANS AND THEIR EMIGRANT RELATIVES ASSOCIATE FAVORABLY WITH NORTHERN EUROPE.

-- ECONOMICS: TO THE DEGREE THAT ECONOMICS IS AN ISSUE IN LEIRIA, IT IS RELATED MORE TO THE DAMAGE DONE BY INSTABILITY THAN TO ANY PRESSING ECONOMIC NEEDS.

- CHURHC: THE BISHOP OF LEIRIA READILY ACKNOWLEDGES HIS OWN ANTI-COMMUNIST CONVICTIONS. LEIRIAN LEADERS AGREE THAT THE PPD AND THE CDS BENEFIT FROM THE CHURCH'S INFLUENCE. IN MOST CASES THIS INFLUENCE IS EXERCISED IN PRIVATE CONVERSATIONS, BUT SOCIALIST DEPUTY PEDRO LAGIDO TELLS OF ONE PRIEST WARNING HIS SUNDAY CONGREGATION THAT NO GOOD EVER COMES FROM A "CLENCHED FIST" (THE PS SYMBOL).

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 LISBON 1693

-- AGRARIAN: ANOTHER ELECTION FACTOR WILL BE THE AGRARIAN PROGRAM OF PS MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE LOPES CARDOSO. WHILE AGRARIAN REFORM HAS NOT TOUCHED LEIRIA, SMALL AND MEDIUM FARMERS IN THE SOUTHER PART OF LEIRIA HAVE ORGANIZED TO PROTEST AGAINST AGRARIAN REFORM AND LOPES CARDOSO. THIS ISSUE WILL BENEFIT THE PPD AND THE CDS, WHICH BOTH HAVE CLOSE LINKS TO THE CONFEDERATION OF PORTUGUESE FARMERS (CAP). THE PPD IS RUNNING ONE MEMBER OF CAP ON ITS LIST OF CANDIDATES FOR DEPUTIES.

4. THE PARTIES: THE CDS IS THE MOST DYNAMIC PARTY IN LEIRIA, BUT IT HAS ONLY ORGANIZED LOCALLY IN THE PAST SIX MONTHS. IN MOST PARTS OF LEIRIA, THE PRINCIPAL COMPETITION IS BETWEEN THE PPD AND THE CDS. HOWEVER, MOST OBSERVERS, INCLUDING LOCAL CDS OFFICIALS
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EXPECT THE CDS'S LATE START WILL LIMIT IT TO A VERY CREDITABLE 20-25 PERCENT. THE PPD HAS THE BEST AND MOST WIDESPREAD ORGANIZATION IN LEIRIA. CDS LEADERS EXPRESSED ADMIRATION THAT THE PPD HAD ALREADY ORGANIZED RELIEF AND MEDICAL PROVISIONS FOR THE 800 NEWLY ARRIVED REFUGEES. PPD LEADERS HOPE TO UP THEIR PERCENTAGE OF THE DISTRICT VOTE TO 40-45 PERCENT. THEY RECOGNIZE THAT MANY FORMER PPD SUPPORTERS WILL VOTE CDS, BUT ARE CONFIDENT THAT EVEN MORE WHO VOTED PS TO STOP THE COMMUNISTS IN 1975 WILL VOTE PPD. THE PPD RETAINS A REASONABLY PROGRESSIVE IMAGE IN LEIRIA, AND APPEALS TO MANY VOTERS IN LARGE TOWNS AND CITIES AS WELL AS MAINTAINING SIGNIFICANT STRENGTH IN RURAL AREAS. PS LEADERS FROM LEIRIA CONCEDE THAT THE PS IS ON THE DEFENSIVE. THERE ARE RELATIVELY FEW PCP OR MDP VOTES TO PICK UP IN THE DISTRICT, AND AT LEAST HALF OF THE 1975 PCP VOTES COME FROM LONG-STANDING PARTY MEMBERS IN MARINHA GRANDE AND OTHER INDUSTRIAL CENTERS. PS LEADERS DO EXPECT TO PICK UP A GOOD PERCENTAGE OF THE MDP VOTES, AND TO HOLD ONTO THEIR UNION STRENGTH IN MARINHA GRANDE AND THE SOUTH OF THE DISTRICT, BUT WOULD BE HAPPY WITH

20-25 PERCENT OF THE VOTE OVERALL.

5. ATMOSPHERE: THE LOCAL LEADERS OF DEMOCRATIC PARTIES KNOW AND TRUST EACH OTHER TOO WELL TO BE ENEMIES. ALL THREE PARTIES WERE PRESENT OUTSIDE THE MONTE REAL AIR BASE DURING THE LEFTIST COUP ATTEMPT. THE CDS DEPUTY FROM LEIRIA IS THE BROTHER OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE PPD POLITICAL COMMITTEE, AND BOTH ARE DEVOTED CATHOLICS. EVEN COMMUNISTS HAVE LEARNED TO PULL IN THEIR HORNS AND GET ALONG IN TOWN COUNCILS AND OTHER AREAS OF LOCAL LIFE WHERE THEY ARE CLEARLY OUTNUMBERED. ONLY IN THE UNIONS OF MARINHA GRANDE DOES THE PCP MAINTAIN A SIGNIFICANT, AGGRESSIVE CADRE.

6. COMMENT: IN THE LARGELY AGRICULTURAL DISTRICT OF LEIRIA, THE PPD'S MODERATELY PROGRESSIVE, STAUNCHLY ANTI-COMMUNIST IMAGE IS QUITE EFFECTIVE. NATIONAL PS CLAIMS THAT THE PPD REMAINED SILENT IN THE STRUGGLE AGAINST THE COMMUNISTS RING HOLLOW IN LEIRIA. FURTHERMORE, THE PPD'S SUPERIOR ORGANIZATION SHOULD HELP PROTECT IT FROM EXTENSIVE CDS INROADS ON THE RIGHT.

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